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C O N F I D E N T I A L MANAMA 001329

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [PTER](#) [BA](#) [POL](#) [REGION](#)
SUBJECT: TFLE01: BAHRAIN TEMPERATURE RISES ON LEBANON AND
PALESTINE

Classified By: DCM Susan L. Ziadeh for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

¶1. (C) Activity on the streets has increased with several protests over the Bahraini weekend July 19-21, including the first directed at the U.S. Embassy. Approximately 300 individuals attempted to march towards the Embassy July 21, but were stopped by security personnel several blocks away. While moving away, twenty some members of the group set fire to tires and trash bins and threw rocks at security personnel. King Hamad, meeting with Egyptian President Mubarak in Cairo July 20, called for a halt to Israeli military actions and a negotiated resolution. The rhetoric in Friday sermons was increasingly supportive of Hizballah and critical of Israel, the international community, Arab governments, and the U.S. Even columnists who have traditionally been supportive of U.S. democracy policy and programs point to the hypocrisy in the U.S. support of Israel, characterized as the number one enemy to democracy. One columnist anticipates that the BMENA Initiative will also be a casualty of the conflict as it is now tainted with U.S. acceptance of the destruction of Lebanon and the denial of a Palestinian state. End summary.

The Protests

¶2. (U) Approximately 300 people demonstrated July 21 in the Zinj area, showing intent to proceed toward the Embassy. The Ministry of Interior stationed some 1,000 police personnel, as well as concertina wire, to prevent the demonstration from approaching the Embassy. Carrying Hizballah, Lebanese, and Bahraini flags, protesters burned an Israeli flag and chanted, "Death to America" and "Death to Israel." After being turned away, a group of about 20 youths set fire to tires and trash cans and threw rocks at security vehicles. A special task force used tear gas to break up this group and arrested several individuals. Additional protests occurred in the village of Diraz, home to the mosque where Shaikh Isa Qassim preaches, and outside the Al Fateh Grand Mosque (Sunni) following Friday prayers.

¶3. (U) Over one thousand residents staged a protest in Sitra (Shia) July 20, chanting slogans in support of Hizballah leader Hasan Nasrallah and the Islamic resistance. Al Wifaq member, and potential candidate in the fall parliamentary elections in Sitra, Sayed Haider Al Sitri read a statement saying that Arabs are facing an expansion of imperialism. The statement questioned whether Arab armies could face a surrender and still hold their heads up honorably as servants under American-Israeli dominance. Two prior rallies took

place July 19 in the Shia villages of Karanah and Barbar, echoing previous criticism of the silence of the international community and urging the UNSC to put pressure on Israel to stop its attacks in Lebanon and Palestine.

King Meets Mubarak

¶4. (U) In a meeting in Cairo July 20, King Hamad Bin Isa Al Khalifa and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak both called for a stop in the Israeli military actions against Lebanon and the Palestinians. They called for the parties to negotiate a resolution to the conflict. King Hamad called for a unified Arab stance that will restore confidence in and push forward the peace process.

The Preachers

¶5. (C) Friday sermons July 21 focused exclusively on the situation in Lebanon. Leading Shia cleric Shaikh Isa Qassim urged both Sunnis and Shia to stand together to support Hamas and Hizballah. He said that Hizballah's beliefs dictate that jihad is a duty in support of its Palestinian brothers. Hizballah laments the blood that is flowing in Iraq, saying that it should be saved to face the "Zionist hounds." Arab regimes should not be preoccupied with internal affairs while turning away from the battle against the enemies of God and humanity. Arab governments should not impose unfair laws against terrorism that will hinder the fight against the enemy, who steals land and plays with the dignity and lives of the Palestinians. (Note: Bahrain's Council of Representatives passed a terrorism bill July 16 with stiff

opposition from some members who say that it gives the state too much authority to detain individuals. The Shura (Consultative) Council is scheduled to begin discussion on the bill July 22. End note.)

¶6. (U) Sunni Shaikh Salah Al Jowder stated that the Islamic nation was under siege by Israel, while Palestine and Lebanon are met with a "strange Arab silence. Although Islam is a religion of moderation, love and peace, God orders Muslims to adhere to their religion, land and dignity and to defend them by any means." Israel's actions have shown the world that it acts against all international conventions and that its agreements with the Arabs, from Camp David to the Roadmap, "are merely ink on paper." He concluded that only unity and adherence to religion can impede Israeli and American plans.

Critical Columns from an Unexpected Direction

¶7. (U) Even columnists who are normally supportive of U.S. democracy and capacity-building programs have turned critical of U.S. policy. Al Wasat editor-in-chief Mansour Al Jamri states that Israel, supported by the U.S., is the number one enemy of democracy in the region. Al Jamri asks, "How can the weak and oppressed be blamed for taking an extremist approach against the official terrorism practiced by Israel under the sponsorship of the super powers? How can our region calm down when its people see Lebanon's infrastructure completely destroyed, while the U.S. President hints at allowing more time for Israel to wipe out Lebanon?"

¶8. (U) Another regular supporter of U.S. programs in Bahrain, Al Wasat columnist Reem Khalifa echoed the words of Palestinian writer Ibrahim Hamami who wrote about the death of the Arab League from heart failure following its recent meeting in Cairo. Khalifa asserts that the Broader Middle East North Africa Initiative should also be mourned since the U.S. administration accepts the destruction of Lebanon and the denial of a legitimate country to the Palestinians. She agrees with Hamami's assertion that the reality is that "(Israeli PM) Olmert and his gangsters", with U.S. and

European support, kill innocents while Arabs are silent.

Political Cartoons - Gruesome and Grim

¶9. (U) A notably graphic political cartoon July 22 depicts a woman representing Lebanon whose bloodied body has been carved up in pieces in the shape of a Star of David by a hand, also having a Star of David, holding a hatchet on which is written "Made in USA." In the background are three figures, one representing the international community with its fingers in its ears (hear no evil), the second wearing traditional Arab dress with its hands over its eyes (see no evil), and the third a caricature of President Bush not covering his mouth, but saying, "Complete your mission." A second cartoon, printed July 20, shows a man in traditional Arab dress fleeing in horror from something not shown, with the inscription of an Arabic proverb meaning that what is happening next door will find its way into one's own home.

Comment

¶10. (C) In one sense, the July 21 demonstration at the Embassy was a minor affair, attracting just 300 demonstrators and easily deterred. At the same time, however, this first demonstration at the Embassy in more than three years reflects the increase we have seen in the level of activity and rhetoric in Bahrain over the past several days. At the official level, Bahraini officials now advocate an immediate cease fire and resolution by diplomatic means, reflective of local sentiment, and in contrast to the King's July 14 statement in which he urged parties not to continue pursuing a "miscalculated adventure, that would affect Lebanon's sovereignty." The public (mostly from the Shia community) has been emboldened in showing their support for Hizballah and its leader Nasrallah. The longer the conflict proceeds and the more civilians are killed, the heat here can be expected to rise palpably along with the rising summer Gulf humidity.

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